

Deaf Culture Question of the Week – May 6 - 10, 2013  
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*In the Signing Exact English (SEE<sup>2</sup>) system, which language property is least important when determining the sign to use for concepts?*

- a) *Meaning*
- b) *Spelling*
- c) Pronunciation

Go to the bottom of this message for the answer.

Answer: "a" - Meaning. In the Signing Exact English system(abbreviated as SEE<sup>2</sup> because it was a spin off from the original group that formed to develop a signing system to represent English)the meaning of a word has the least influence on how the concept is signed. To determine whether two words are signed the same or differently SEE<sup>2</sup> uses what they call the "two out of three" principle; that is, if any two are the same "meaning, spelling, or pronunciation" then the two words will be signed the same.

Let's analyze how this works; for example,

1. It was a home run.
2. The woman had a run in her stocking.
3. I run for exercise.

The word "run" in all three of these sentences is spelled the same and is pronounced the same; therefore, all three occurrences of "run" will be signed

with the same sign. In the SEE<sup>2</sup> system they happen to choose the sign from ASL that means "to run using one's legs" to represent the English spelling "run." It is interesting that in sentences 1 and 2 above "run" is actually a noun. In sentence 3 it is a verb. In the first two sentences the word "run" will be represented by a verb sign and it doesn't matter that the meaning of the word "run" in these two sentences has nothing to do with using one's legs to move fast.

As it turns out, it is almost never the case that meaning counts. Spelling and pronunciation usually trump meaning. SEE<sup>2</sup> recommends that when possible signers should perform the sign in a location that may add an element of meaning. Following this suggestion one might sign the following two sentences with the sign meaning "to run" but with placement of the sign in two different locations.

My nose is running. (Execute the sign "to run" under the nose pointing downward.)

There is a run in my stockings. (Execute the sign "to run" down by one's leg pointing downward.)

The history of development of SEE-type signing systems is interesting and is recounted briefly in an excellent chapter on "Sign Systems" in the book *Language and Deafness* by Peter Paul, chapter five. To access this chapter which explains all of the various signed English systems, Google Language and Deafness and then click on Chapter Five. It is a fascinating read.